Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/188631410

Downloaded on Mar 26, 2024

Goldstein: An Aging Elite

Continued from F6

Pauline Kael was a tart-tongued goddess who could make a director's reputation with one bravura review—she launched Robert Altman's "Nashville" months before it was released, and it was her championing of "Bonnie and Clyde" that revived the film after a disastrous early launch. (Kael, bless her heart, dismissed Kubrick with the quip: "The only memorable character in his films of the past 20 years is Hal the computer.") But since her retirement in 1991, no one's filled her shoes.

Film isn't the only arena in which critics have lost their wallop. The glory days of rock criticism were the late '60s and '70s when gunslingers like Lester Bangs and R. Meltzer ruled the roost, frosting firebombs at rock's most sacred cows. Today it's almost impossible to get less than three stars from the toothless crew that toils for Rolling Stone. It's been just as quiet on the theater front ever since New York Timesman Frank Rich, the much-feared Butcher of Broadway, left his critic's post for the op-ed pages.

Today, desperate to make their voices heard, critics either drown a movie in mounds of fawning flattery or don sackcloth and ashes, bemoaning the end of Western civilization every time they see a dim-bulb comedy or a sleazy thriller. In 1983, David Denby, then New York magazine's film critic, described Sly Stallone's "Staying Alive" as "no ordinary terrible movie; it's a vision of the end. As you watch it, the idea of what a movie is crumbles before your eyes." OK, David, but after that, what are you gonna say about "Tomb Raider"?

Yet critics remain suckers for their pet cinema gods, even after they're long past their prime. Martin Scorsese still gets gooey kid-glove treatment for dreary backwork like "Bringing Out the Dead," which the New York Observer's Andrew Sarris hailed as "a cinch to be on lists of the best films of the year." (It wasn't.)

If you think reviewers were bamboozled by "A.I," read the breath-taking blather with which critics greeted Kubrick's "Eyes Wide Shut," a chilly marital drama rejected by moviegoers once they recovered from the media hype over the Tom Cruise-Nicole Kidman sex scenes. Time magazine's Richard Schickel dubbed it "Kubrick's haunting final masterpiece." The New York Times' Janet Maslin gushed: "This astonishing last film is a spellbinding addition to the Kubrick canon." Boy, if I'd had some teachers who graded on a curve like that in high school, I might have gotten into Harvard!

Most of today's leading critics came of age in the late '60s and '70s, at precisely the time when Hollywood movies were enjoying a brief golden age, fueled by bold Young Turks led by Francis Ford Coppola, Robert Altman, Arthur Penn, Roman Polanski, Scorsese and Hal Ashby. It was a time when movies had grand ambitions. It was also a time when audiences were far more supportive of daring filmmakers and darker, more challenging subject matter. Movies like "Chinatown," "Shampoo" and "Nashville" were box-office hits in the '70s. But with rare exceptions, such as "American Beauty," today's audiences prefer safe, less demanding fare. But part of being a critic is to have higher expectations.

And the critics who grew up under the spell of those films can't help but feel a deep yearning for the go-for-broke passion that's largely absent in today's films. Who could forget the thrill of seeing "The Wild Bunch" or "Mean Streets" for the first time—it's like trying to forget the first time you had sex. It's no coincidence that Kael's first book of reviews was called "I Lost It at the Movies."

Maybe that's why, in the end, I can't fault critics for occasionally giving a wet kiss to an aging heavyweight. They've got their standards and they're sticking to them, even though they're writing about a medium that sold its soul to the box-office devil long ago.

"The Big Picture" runs every Tuesday in Calendar. If you have questions, ideas or criticism, e-mail them to patrick.goldstein@latimes.com.

Weekend Box Office

	Movie (Studio)	Three-day gross/ Total (millions)	Screens/ Average	Weeks in Release
1.	"Legally Blonde" (MGM)	$20.4 $20.4	2,620 $7,778	1
2.	"The Score" (Paramount)	$19.0 $19.0	2,129 $8,933	1
3.	"Cats & Dogs" (Warner Bros.)	$12.0 $58.9	3,040 $3,958	2
4.	"Final Fantasy" * (Sony/Columbia)	$11.4 $19.0	2,649 $4,307	1
5.	"Scary Movie 2" (Dimension)	$9.6 $53.0	3,220 $2,967	2
6.	"The Fast and the Furious" (Universal)	$8.1 $115.6	2,899 $2,790	4
7.	"Dr. Dolittle 2" (Fox)	$7.5 $84.7	2,829 $2,645	4
8.	"Kiss of the Dragon" (Fox)	$6.0 $24.1	2,100 $2,862	2
9.	"A.I. Artificial Intelligence" (Warner Bros.)	$5.2 $70.1	2,830 $1,843	3
10.	"Lara Croft: Tomb Raider" (Paramount)	$3.9 $122.5	2,164 $1,794	5

*Opened Wednesday

Location. Location. Location.
Los Angeles Times Classified
www.latimes.com/classified
1-800-234-4444

ENTER THE "PLANET OF THE APES" SWEEPSTAKES.
CHECK FRIDAY'S CALENDAR SECTION FOR DETAILS.
PLANET OF THE APES
JULY 27th ONLY IN THEATRES

"THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS" FIRES ON ALL CYLINDERS!"
THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS
PG-13

"THE SCORE" IS A TWISTING CAPER WITH A SWITCH THAT WILL BLOW YOU AWAY.
"TWO THUMBS UP FOR "THE SCORE!"
"...SMART, TENSE, CLEVER AND METHODICAL."
"THE SCORE" IS TERRIFIC FUN."
THE SCORE
R

Copyright © 2024 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.

Powered by Newspapers.com